SIL INTERNATIONAL AND
THE DISCIPLINARY CULTURE OF LINGUISTICS

Introduction

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This collection of papers is an attempt to begin a new conversation among academic linguists about the scope, institutional underpinnings, and implications for academia of the work being carried out by our missionary counterparts, particularly the Bible translation organization SIL International (SIL). The observation that we take as our starting point is one that some linguists might never have considered, while others take it for granted: that there are systematic dependencies between our discipline on the one hand, and a Christian missionary organization and its products on the other. Because it necessarily raises very personal questions of religion and motivation, this topic is a sensitive one that we know many would rather avoid. But as several of the contributors here try to make clear, the time has come for the community of academic linguists to reconsider its role in sustaining this status quo.

My interest in the relationship between academic linguistics and SIL grows out of discussions I have had with Jeff Good over the past several years. Good conducts fieldwork on Bantoid languages in Northwest Cameroon and has a long-standing interest in digital aspects of language documentation. My fieldwork has been on the Arapesh languages of Papua New Guinea, where I have explored not only traditional linguistic questions about grammatical structure, but also issues surrounding the community-fieldworker relationship from an anthropological point of view. Like many other academically based field linguists, both Good and I have benefited enormously from mission expertise and infrastructure in the field. We have received generous advice and practical assistance from SIL colleagues in our respective field regions. We have relied on numerous mission resources in carrying out our primary research: *Ethnologue*, phonetic fonts, and previously collected word lists; library collections, transportation, accommodations in the field; even foreign currency exchange at the best rate in town. Indeed, we can hardly imagine being able to do fieldwork without these things. And yet, the current professional climate of concern for small and endangered languages has led us to question the extent to which SIL, with its guiding project of facilitating the worldwide spread of Christianity, is really a fellow traveler.

Preliminary versions of these papers were presented at the 2007 Linguistic Society of America annual meeting in Anaheim, CA, in a symposium entitled 'Missionaries and scholars: The overlapping agendas of linguists in the field'. The participants were invited because of the diverse experiences and disciplinary perspectives they brought to the incipient conversation. Patience Epps is an anthropologically trained linguist who conducted documentary fieldwork in Amazonia, where she observed firsthand the tensions arising from mission activities in native communities. After the symposium, Epps began collaborating with Herb Ladley, whose interest in faith as a motivation for linguistic work led him to carry out research on SIL recruiting and fundraising practices while he was a student at the University of Virginia. He now works in the field of

international development finance. Linguistic anthropologist Courtney Handman conducted research with Guhu-Samane speakers in rural Papua New Guinea (PNG), as well as at the SIL-PNG headquarters in Ukarumpa, PNG. She studies the ways in which mission language ideologies and translation practices have shaped moral attitudes toward traditionalism in a recently Christianized society. William Svelmoe is a historian of American religion who grew up in the Philippines, where his parents worked as missionary linguists with SIL. In line with his interest in the history of Protestant evangelical missions, he has written a scholarly biography of SIL's founder, Cameron Townsend. Kenneth Olson is a linguist with research specializations in phonology, phonetics, African languages, and historical linguistics; he is also an SIL member with extensive experience preparing future SIL fieldworkers for language-development work all over the world.

There was one participant in the LSA symposium, Daniel Everett, who elected not to publish his paper in this collection. Everett, a former SIL member and active contributor to linguistic theory, raised several issues that thread throughout the other papers. One is the need to clearly distinguish between the SIL linguists most familiar to those in the academy—including individual luminaries like Kenneth Pike and Eugene Nida—and the ordinary operations of SIL as an institution, something about which most academic linguists are only dimly aware (see the papers by Dobrin and Good, Olson). Another is the power of SIL's academic identity to advance the organization's religious goals (see the papers by Epps and Ladley, Svelmoe).

Among the collection's common themes, there is one that stands out above all: the great gap between academically produced knowledge about language on the one hand, and real-world problems on the other. As the papers in this collection show, SIL has been bridging this gap for the last seventy years, especially in those areas of the world where support for local languages has not been forthcoming from government or commercial interests. I hope that the perspectives offered here will inspire readers to think constructively, using SIL as an example, about how academic linguistics might foster the creation of secular linguistic institutions to help serve this important role.

Practical language development: Whose mission?*

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The purpose of this paper is to explore academic linguistics' tacit reliance on a Christian missionary organization, SIL International, to develop technological infrastructure and offer service in local linguistic communities—areas that have generally been ignored by academic linguistics because they have been seen as falling outside its domain of professional responsibility. We refer to these kinds of activities as PRACTICAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT because they draw upon linguistic expertise to solve practical real-world problems. Until now, academic linguists have benefited from the practical language development work carried out by our missionary counterparts without much

deliberation. But with the contemporary rise in concern over language endangerment, the time has come for us to reflect on how this partnership of convenience can be reconciled with the changing priorities of the discipline. As we redouble our efforts to document, understand, and support the world's linguistic diversity, academic linguists are taking a renewed interest in fieldwork. There are more numerous and generous sources of funding for endangered-language research. Documentary linguistics, which takes the collection, preservation, and annotation of primary linguistic data as its key aim, is emerging as a subfield in its own right (Woodbury 2003, Himmelmann 2006). A growing recognition of the social and economic forces that drive language shift has led many linguists to see basic research in small, minority, and indigenous language communities as addressing issues of human rights (Nettle & Romaine 2000, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, Hinton 2002). Moral and political questions like who funds linguistic work, who carries it out, and who benefits from it and how are much harder to ignore in the context of these changes (Dorian 1993, England 1995). At the same time, changes in the way information is communicated, initiated by the spread of digital technology, have created demands for precise methods of referring to language names, written characters, lexical items, and other linguistic objects. But movements within the academy have not kept pace with these demands.

   The discussion that follows is grounded in three key positions. The first is a need to focus on academic linguistics' own role in perpetuating a by now well-established and comfortable complementarity with SIL. The missionary enterprise is going to carry on regardless of what others think of it, so the question we are asking is not what SIL should be doing, but what academic linguistics should be doing, and what kind of relationship we want to maintain with an organization whose agendas diverge in important ways from those of the discipline. Second, in thinking about these questions, we are orienting ourselves toward the future, which the intertwined problems of language endangerment and technological evolution have brought into sharp focus, and not simply critiquing an unchangeable past. Finally, we seek to examine not the choices of individuals but rather the deeply entrenched institutional framework within which those choices are made. In so doing, we hope to draw the community of linguists into an open and constructive dialogue about the moral and practical configuration of the discipline at a historical juncture when the problems surrounding linguistic diversity are pressing upon us all in new ways.

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   It has been suggested that an ethnographically based anthropology might never have developed were it not for 'a supporting cast of missionaries', and there is no doubt that missionaries have likewise had a tremendous impact on the establishment of linguistics

(Burton & Burton 2007:214; see also Higham 2003). The first language descriptions we have for many parts of the world are the legacy of missionary linguists.[1] Many typologically significant features of non-Western languages were first made known to linguistic science through the work of early European missionaries, and missionary field linguists continue to make significant contributions to the discipline today. The inclusive/exclusive category, a structuring dimension of many of the world's pronoun systems, is one grammatical phenomenon whose discovery by missionary linguists has been particularly well studied (Haas 1969, Mannheim 1982); the more recent documentation of object-initial word order is another example (Derbyshire 1977). In the first half of the twentieth century, missionary linguists' practical need for dependable field methods dovetailed with academic interests in scientific reliability, leading to the development of standard methodologies or discovery procedures that reached their greatest elaboration and sophistication in the handbooks of Pike (1947) and Nida (1949) and that continue to inform the teaching and analytical practice of university linguists. In 2005 the set of IPA symbols was expanded for the first time in over a decade on the basis of evidence put forward by an SIL linguist, Ken Olson (Olson & Hajek 1999, International Phonetic Association 2005).

But academic linguists—especially those who encounter missionaries in the course of their fieldwork—at times contend that missionary activities are at odds with their professional goals of supporting cultural and linguistic diversity (Pennycook & Makoni 2005).[2] SIL's commitment to Bible translation necessarily leads it to promote vernacular literacy, even though such interventions can be problematic in fragile linguistic ecologies without an indigenous written tradition (Rehg 2004, Grenoble & Whaley 2005). Missionary literacy work can carry with it certain biases, prioritizing reading over writing and approaching texts as inherently truth-bearing (Schieffelin 2000). Cultural assumptions about how the very process of speaking works may be at odds with Christian views; for example, the alignment of speech with inner belief that is so valorized by Western Judeo-Christianity (being truthful, nonsecretive, and so on) is by no means universal (Ochs Keenan 1976, Rosaldo 1982, Robbins 2001, Keane 2002; see also Handman's contribution to this collection).

Of course, there are other powerful outside forces—including extractive industries like logging and mining, NGO-sponsored projects, product marketing, and governments—that have serious effects on local communities. And vernacular classification and standardization projects raise questions about orthography, register, and purity that can be difficult and even divisive for communities regardless of who sponsors them (England 2003, Grenoble & Whaley 2006). Christian missionaries bear special consideration not because they bring about more or greater changes than these other groups do, but because of the key role that language plays in their enterprise (Keane 2007). This means that academic and missionary linguists share concerns, making them likely allies, as indicated by the present status quo. It also means that academic linguists are specially positioned to evaluate the impact of missionary activity on languages and communities. This latter point should resonate even with those for whom missionary linguistics presents no moral

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[1] For the Americas, see, for example, Hanzeli 1969, Haas 1978, McKevitt 1990, Koerner 2004. Gray 2000 is an excellent concise historical overview of missionary linguistics.

[2] See also Pennycook and Coutand-Marin's 2003 critique of global English teaching, perhaps today's most active linguistic mission field.

quandary. Simply put, to the extent that missionary interventions bring about changes in linguistic practices and attitudes, such as reshaping the speech forms associated with indigenous religion, making new demands on speakers' metalinguistic resources, or introducing standardized ways of reading, they are an important factor in changing language ecologies (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo 1991, Kirsch 2007, Schieffelin 2007). For that reason if for no other, their work deserves to be an active topic of discussion in linguistics, especially once such wider social matters as language vitality and maintenance are acknowledged to be issues of concern to the discipline.

But despite these considerations, discussion of the consequences of missionary activity has been minimal in linguistics. In this respect linguistics contrasts with anthropology, where the discipline's relationship to missionaries is widely taken to be 'ambivalent, uneasy, and fraught with contradictions' and has been the subject of serious discussion at least since the 1960s (van der Geest 1990:588).[3] Moreover, what little discussion of missionaries has taken place in linguistics has tended to proceed from what is felt to be a neutral position: that the motivations and choices that lead individuals to carry out linguistic work are essentially free and beyond question. There are two problems with this way of approaching the topic (or avoiding it, as the case may be). One is that when we take great pains to respect all differences of opinion we end up being able to say very little. For example, Grenoble and Whaley, who laudably attempt to address the role of missionary linguists in language revitalization, can say only that 'one finds mixed reports and differing attitudes . . . about the appropriateness of a missionary-linguist's involvement in a community' (2006:196). It would be likewise hard to argue with Dixon and Aikhenvald's assessment of the missionaries involved in Amazonian linguistics: '[t]here is good and bad in every group' (1999:2). But the more serious problem with a focus on individual choices is that it draws our attention away from the institutional structures that powerfully shape the set of choices in the first place. Here we are referring not to the official policies of formal bodies like SIL or the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), but rather to the larger cultural systems, like the elaborate but diffuse apparatus for academic publication, or the mechanisms for mission fundraising, through which individuals' actions and attitudes are organized socially.

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In refocusing attention on language documentation and fieldwork, documentary linguistics is reaffirming its reliance on tools, information, and facilities developed by SIL. Like fieldworkers from other disciplines, academic linguists regularly appeal to missionaries for logistical assistance in the field: making contacts and selecting a fieldsite, arranging housing and transportation, learning about the culture, and so forth. But non-SIL linguists also use fonts and keyboarding tools distributed by SIL in order to digitally encode the material they collect, and many depend on SIL-produced software

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[3] A number of scholarly works address the relationship between missionaries and anthropologists. They are by no means all critical. Works focused specifically on SIL include Hvalkof & Aaby 1981b, Stoll 1982, Colby & Dennett 1995, and Hartch 2006. Louis-Jean Calvet's 1987 book *La guerre des langues et les politiques linguistiques* has a chapter devoted to a critique of SIL, though remarkably, it is excised without comment from the English language edition (Calvet 1998). An English translation by Victor Manfredi can be read online at http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/CalvetCh14anglaisSIL.pdf.

to organize and store their data.[4] The sociolinguistic situation of many languages is known to specialists and nonspecialists alike through the results of SIL-sponsored surveys, which are disseminated through the authoritative voice of *Ethnologue*, SIL's global language inventory (Gordon 2005). This point of dependence has even been noted in the popular press: in 2005 the *New York Times* published an article in the Science Times explaining 'how linguists and missionaries share a Bible' (Erard 2005). SIL linguists have also taken a leading role in the current development of standards for endangered-language documentation. Indeed, the language codes used by SIL's *Ethnologue* have now been adopted as an essential component of an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standard for language identification. (We return to this matter below.) Association with academic linguistics in turn provides SIL with the legitimacy of disinterested science, and hence a 'vehicle for creating an alliance with whichever national elites are concerned with foreign expertise and ''development'' ' in the countries where it operates (Gilliam 1984:310; see also Svelmoe, this collection).

Academic linguistics shares SIL's interest in languages and peoples on the margins of global modernity and power. Nevertheless, our institutional goals are ultimately distinct. Academic linguistics strives to understand what languages are: how they are constituted, how they function, what they reveal about the past and present worlds of their speakers, what they reveal about human cognition. Within SIL, by contrast, languages are of interest because they are held to provide a privileged form of access to their native speakers (Cowan 1979). Like other linguistically oriented missionary activities—Bible translation, language teaching, literacy training, software development—linguistic survey and analysis is carried out by SIL in the service of Christianization: presenting (or in many parts of the world now, reinforcing) a particular set of religious beliefs and practices, and encouraging others to embrace them as their own. This is not to say that individual SIL linguists are not motivated by a fascination with language just as secular linguists are. But it does mean that the INSTITUTIONAL VALUE SIL places on linguistic work necessarily depends on that work's perceived alignment with the organization's religious goals.[5]

Reliance on SIL-sponsored resources thus makes academic linguists vulnerable to changes in mission priorities that proceed from these goals. For example, SIL has phased out the popular lexicon and text-analysis tool Shoebox despite its widespread adoption by the academic community, as the organization has chosen to turn its 'attention to translation-related tasks for which there have been fewer computer solutions' (SIL International 2007).[6] But the divergence in missionary and academic linguistic agendas is nowhere more apparent than in the diminishing deployment of missionary

[4] Indeed, the SIL fonts that serve as a standard resource for linguists of all persuasions have names drawn from Christian theology: Doulos from the Greek for 'servant', Charis from the Greek for 'grace', Gentium from Latin 'of the nations'.

[5] SIL linguists are keenly aware that their supporters' primary focus is on their work's spiritual impact, since in most cases they raise funds for their work themselves. An emphasis on the spiritual dividends of SIL's technical investments is evident in statements such as these from SIL/Wycliffe promotional materials: 'Media tools are like salt, making people thirsty for God's Word' (JAARS n.d.), or 'God created computers for missions. He just lets the rest of the world use them' (Wycliffe Bible Translators 2004).

[6] SIL has been developing FieldWorks Language Explorer as a replacement, though currently it runs only on Microsoft Windows (http://www.sil.org/computing/fieldworks/flex; see Butler & van Volkinburg 2007). Individuals associated with SIL have continued to develop Shoebox under the new name 'Toolbox', but these activities do not represent official efforts on the part of SIL's computing division.

linguists to those languages that are least vital, and so least in need of vernacular-language religious materials. After all, '[b]ecause SIL linguistics personnel generally commit 10 to 20 years of their lives to living and working within specific indigenous people groups for the purpose of facilitating language development projects', such projects are only started where they 'are likely to remain viable to the end' (Landweer 2000:5; see also Quakenbush 2007). As a result, the languages that are most endangered are least likely to receive SIL's close attention. Yet these are precisely the languages that academic linguistics now deems most urgently in need of attention. For example, the LSA's statement on the need to document linguistic diversity suggests that 'highest priority [be] given to the many languages which are closest to becoming extinct' (Linguistic Society of America 1994). Increasingly, SIL has extended its reach by training 'local teams' or nationals in the countries where it works to carry out translation through sister organizations like the Bible Translators Association in Papua New Guinea, the Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy, the Translators Association of the Philippines, and so forth. But what most nationals are doing under the aegis of these sister organizations is producing religious materials in practical orthographies, and sometimes local literacy materials, typically for languages that are closely related to those already being worked on by SIL linguists. They are not producing the kind of extensive language documentation that is most useful for cultural preservation and informative to linguistic science (Handman 2007). The attention now being given in documentary linguistics to the creation and preservation of primary data (i.e. archiving original audio and video recordings, fieldnotes, and texts) has no counterpart in SIL, only a small fraction of whose linguistic personnel carry out their work in dialogue with the academy (Everett 2007). In other words, the affinity academic linguists may feel with SIL's claim to be 'a leader in the research of the world's endangered languages' (SIL International 2004) derives as much from what Edward Sapir (1949 [1932]:516) called 'friendly ambiguities of language' as it does from actual shared goals.

Yet the discipline of linguistics has, largely through its own inertia, allowed SIL to take over leadership roles that we argue would be more appropriately held by the academic community. The tensions here are felt most acutely within documentary linguistics, the core of the endangered-language research paradigm, since it benefits more directly than any other subfield from SIL infrastructure. Documentary linguists were made keenly aware of this situation with the 2007 adoption of the three-letter *Ethnologue* codes as a central component of the first comprehensive ISO standard for language identification, ISO 639-3, and the concomitant establishment of SIL as the registration authority overseeing the standard's update.[7] ISO granted SIL, a missionary organization, authority over this international linguistic standard because the academic community was unable to offer an alternative. The *Ethnologue* is simply the closest thing that exists to a comprehensive listing of the languages of the world. Even before their adoption by ISO, the *Ethnologue* codes had already become the de facto standard, not only for individual linguists, but also for major digital language archives and funding programs.[8] So officializing the codes has had little effect on academic practice. It has,

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[7] See http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/.

[8] See, for example, the solicitation for the 2006 National Science Foundation and National Endowment for the Humanities Documenting Endangered Languages grants (http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2006/nsf06577/nsf06577.htm), which encourages the use of three-letter SIL codes in the titles of all proposals, or the 2003 Open Language Archives Community standards recommendation for language references in metadata records (Bird & Simons 2003).

however, made it clear that academic linguistics has virtually nothing to say about an aspect of its object of study that is of intense and legitimate interest outside the discipline: when asked what the languages of the world are, it is only SIL that is ready to answer. One academic organization has officially questioned this new arrangement: the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas (SSILA). SSILA neither supports nor condemns SIL's missionary activities. It does, however, acknowledge that a standard is not secure until it enjoys support from the full range of its users, something the *Ethnologue*-derived ISO 639-3 codes do not have (Epps et al. 2006, SSILA 2006).[9]

How has this situation come about? The answer seems clear: the institutional structure of the academy has not been conducive to the kinds of efforts that would be required to create such a comprehensive catalog. Academic linguists are constrained by the need to produce timely, original publications, whereas a work like *Ethnologue* is a long-term community-wide effort pooling many people's knowledge. And then there are the financial realities. Missionary linguistics derives its income from donations by Christian benefactors who are committed to reaching community after community 'until the whole world knows' (as the common evangelical expression has it). But the discipline of linguistics has only recently begun investing real resources in the notion that every last language really and truly matters.[10]

SIL maintains a comprehensive language list because it facilitates the organization's ability to allocate resources for its main task, translating the Bible. But for academic linguists, who have been more focused on advancing knowledge than on putting that knowledge to practical use, such encyclopedic cataloging projects are rather less attractive. Developing an inventory of the world's languages has hardly been a valued intellectual endeavor in a discipline whose expansion in the latter half of the twentieth century went hand in hand with the rejection of a 'taxonomic, data processing approach' to the study of language (Chomsky 1965:52). Those who spend years working to understand the intricacies of the language distributions of particular areas know how difficult it is to draw language and dialect distinctions, let alone genealogical trees. What would we have to gain from such a reductionist exercise? Twenty, or even ten, years ago, the answer would probably have been: not much. But circumstances have changed since then, making it harder for us to remain aloof from such practical projects. Just as the goal of producing the Christian Bible in all the world's languages leads SIL to maintain data on which 'people groups' (Dayton & Fraser 1990:28) do and do not have vernacular Scriptures, the goal of documenting the world's linguistic diversity has created demand for comparable resources, though ones indicating level of documentation in place of translation need.[11]

[9] *Ethnologue* may be the best listing of the world's languages that is available, but it is also widely recognized to be 'far from accurate or consistent' (Evans 2010:22). While we might have expected the academic community to embrace the opportunity provided by the new open ISO standard to seriously engage with these problems, this has not in fact happened. Of the more than 450 ISO 639-3 code change requests submitted through the first three review cycles (for 2006, 2007, and 2008; see http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/), whose status was resolved as of February 26, 2009, only around fifteen percent were submitted by individuals who were not affiliated with SIL, New Tribes, or other mission organizations. The most recent cycle was the most balanced of the three, with about an even divide between mission and nonmission submissions. But this still strikes us as a rather skewed participation profile for an international standard.

[10] Even here, the impetus comes in part from outside funding initiatives, which are reorienting priorities within the discipline.

[11] The Australian Indigenous Languages Database (AUSTLANG; http://austlang.aiatsis.gov.au/) offers an example of what such a resource might look like. Note that the database attempts to provide an index of

There is in fact a more general demand for machine-readable language designations like the ISO codes as linguistic resources increasingly become digital, and a reliable means is sought for searching and collating this digital language data. Here the substantive results of linguistic research are being called upon to serve needs that are not limited by the traditional boundaries of the discipline. For example, before a Wikipedia can be created in a new language, it is a requirement that the language be assigned a valid ISO code.[12] The Wikimedia Foundation defers to ISO on this matter because it lacks the expertise to determine whether a speech variety should be deemed a language, and as we know, the stakes of such decisions are high. In this new era, what counts as a language as opposed to a dialect is no longer so much about who has an army and a navy; it is about who has a three-letter code. As scholars of language, we may shake our heads at the way this reduction inadequately represents the complexities of linguistic and social situations. But we must recognize that standards like the ISO codes will be used as proxies for linguistic expertise regardless of their inadequacies, and their material consequences are only likely to increase with time. Academic linguists are in a special position to make visible the inevitably political decision-making process in which the code set is grounded.[13] Monitoring, if not maintaining, the code set could even be considered our professional responsibility, given that many language communities lack the resources to navigate ISO's bureaucratic procedures to make sure that their interests are fairly represented.

Language labeling is not the only domain in which practical matters of digital language encoding intersect with linguistic interests. Nor is it the only domain in which SIL is working to meet new language-development needs, while academic linguists largely watch from the sidelines. For example, some mechanism is needed to facilitate the exchange of documents that incorporate non-Roman characters, from phonetic symbols to the Cherokee syllabary. Here too, issues of professional responsibility come to the fore. Input from the academic community could contribute to the development of script encoding standards applicable to all languages, as opposed to those that are most economically or religiously profitable. This is a real concern. As Deborah Anderson (2007) has noted, 'Because proposals for the encoding of minority and historical scripts often entail significant research, and their user communities have little economic or political voice, such script proposals have not been submitted [for review] in any regular manner . . . This means that effectively, many linguistic minorities and scholarly communities could be permanently left behind in the information age'. But whereas the academic community has paid but slight attention to this problem, SIL has devoted extensive resources to it through projects like the Non-Roman Script Initiative, the most prominent output of which is the set of Unicode fonts encoding phonetic and other special characters that linguists commonly use.[14] Yet just as SIL's mission agenda

the available documentation for each language, and so includes for each a documentation 'score'. A related effort is found in the UNESCO *Atlas of the world's languages in danger* (Moseley 2009).

[12] See http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Meta:Language_proposal_policy (accessed February 26, 2009).

[13] The political nature of code change decisions is clearly on display in the discussion surrounding the proposal of a distinct code for Valencian, a language variety currently covered under the code [cat], also associated with Catalan. The proposal was ultimately rejected, but not before generating over a hundred pages of comments from interested parties (http://www.sil.org/ISO6393/cr_files/PastComments/CR_Comments_2006-129.pdf).

[14] Work on the Script Encoding Initiative is a notable exception to the general pattern of academic inattention to minority scripts; see Anderson 2003, 2007. For a general overview of SIL's Non-Roman Script Initiative, see http://scripts.sil.org/default. For discussion of efforts to integrate the software from the Non-Roman Script Initiative's Graphite font rendering system into non-SIL software, see Byfield 2006.

has led the organization to devote only limited attention to the most endangered language varieties, SIL's emphasis on the production of written texts leads it to de-emphasize important issues of variation and nontextual modalities, as reflected in gaps in the development effort expended on such kinds of data.[15] In sum, the digitization of language data has created significant real-world demands for the kinds of expertise that academic linguists possess, but until now have been content to let SIL provide, for better or for worse.

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The question of SIL's relationship to the academy arises in the climate of heightened concern with professional responsibility that we are experiencing in linguistics today, in large part growing out of the endangered-language research agenda. We have been moved as a discipline to act out of a sense that it would be wrong to 'obliviously preside' over the disappearance of our subject matter, to use Michael Krauss's memorable phrase (1992:10). Our renewed interest in fieldwork is bringing us into contact with speakers who are more assertive, invested, and knowledgeable than ever before, and who are placing their own expectations and constraints on the work we do in their communities (England 1992). Acting on recommendations by the Committee on Endangered Languages and their Preservation, the LSA has formed an ethics body for the first time in the organization's history. For these same reasons, academic linguists now find themselves CONVERGING with missions in seeking to bring about social change (Silverstein 1998)—revitalizing languages, empowering speakers, advocating on behalf of specific communities, and drawing public attention to the value of human diversity.

While many academic linguists understand this work as informed by a moral agenda entirely different from that of SIL, missionary linguistics does present a model we have much to learn from.[16] The mission enterprise leads it to stress the human dimension of linguistics. The mission project is a collective one. Missionary linguists work in an institutional atmosphere of mutual support and commitment to common goals. Their interactions with speakers are not narrowly constrained by their research interests, so that they find themselves offering people help and hope in ways that extend well beyond issues of language. Indeed, it is to their medical as well as moral interventions that SIL linguists attribute their success in revitalizing several endangered languages in Amazonia and Melanesia (Cahill 2000). It is a core part of SIL's method to cultivate enduring, multifaceted relationships with communities of speakers, an approach that figures centrally in the organization's humanism and, in some countries, its indisputable success. As discussed by Lewis and Trudell (2007), there are parts of the world where outside linguists have an important role to play in language development because local infrastructure is too weak to support it, even when policies are favorable. For example, in the 1990s, Papua New Guinea instituted major educational reforms to promote the

[15] So when it comes to digital audio analysis, for example, one finds that the most successful tools, like Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2009), are not SIL products.

[16] Missiologist John Hitchen (2002) makes this point from a complementary perspective. Citing the vision for contemporary anthropology's public role as a 'witness and recorder of our times' that 'enlarges our sense of moral community' by helping us to better appreciate 'the cultural diversity that pervades our globe' (Borofsky 1994:487–88), Hitchen suggests that mainstream anthropology should be open to learning from its missionary counterparts.

use of its hundreds of vernaculars in the early years of schooling. And when it did so, SIL was right there, ready to step into this opening to conduct surveys, train teachers, and create materials for use in those schools. In 2006 Papua New Guinea's postal service, Post PNG, issued a series of stamps commemorating SIL's fifty years of work in their communities.[17] At the moment it seems inconceivable that the work of contemporary academic linguists could be lauded in this way. But we believe this could change.

What we are suggesting, then, is that it is time for academic linguistics to take some responsibility for those areas of our overlapping interest that we have until now left to SIL. For linguistics to externalize the development of technological and community resources because the problems they solve are practical rather than scholarly, or because they are others' rather than ours, is increasingly untenable. The problems that call upon specialized linguistic knowledge for their solution are numerous and growing, and indifferent to the traditional boundaries of the discipline. And they require leadership from the linguistics community as a whole if they are to be addressed in a way that is thorough and equitable. We do not underestimate the scope of the institutional change that would need to take place to make academic engagement with these problems natural and productive, given that at present we find ourselves unprepared for even the administrative task of maintaining a set of language codes.[18] For our relatively resource-poor discipline to take ownership of this one area alone would be a major undertaking. It would require new forms of collaboration and would ideally be supported by a number of national and international initiatives. Some of the individuals contributing their expertise to the project would no doubt be missionary linguists. But then both the power and the responsibility for shaping our communal resources would be more appropriately distributed—more ecumenical.

Institutional change takes time. But we can begin working toward it now by imagining how linguistics might extend itself to fulfill its professional obligations in the more socially engaged way that is called for in the twenty-first century (Florey 2008). Individual linguists could do more to tap into the current generation of students' commitment to service and idealistic concern about language endangerment by exploring the channels that exist within their own institutions for promoting university-community engagement. Well-established organizations like the LSA could take a more active role in making linguistics a source for trusted, authoritative advice and skills by serving as a point of contact for semi-scholarly projects that require relationships with international bodies such as ISO and UNESCO, in ways comparable to what the Center for Applied Linguistics has done for the past half century within the United States. And given that practical language-development projects are not always well suited to an academic framework in which primary value is placed on individual advancement and scholarly results, we need to be open to building new KINDS of institutional structures that would allow linguists to put their specialized training to good use in the world. Perhaps some of these would be organized along the lines of international nonprofit organizations like Partners in Health[19] or Engineers without Borders.[20] Or perhaps an entirely new vision is needed. Linguistics could come to more closely resemble fields like medicine

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[17] http://www.sil.org/sil/news/2006/PNGstamps.htm

[18] Currently SIL covers the expenses associated with maintaining the code set.

[19] http://pih.org

[20] http://ewb-usa.org

or economics, where interplay between theory and practice is welcomed as adding to their richness, and where 'applied' forms of work are not seen as belonging to a separate discipline. But before we can begin to imagine linguistics developing in such directions, we will need to appreciate how we have shaped ourselves until now around the ubiquitous presence of SIL.

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'We do not want to masquerade as linguists': A short history of SIL and the academy

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SIL International trains between two hundred and three hundred linguists every year. Many of these missionary linguists will use their training not only to win converts to Protestant Christianity, but also to add to SIL's massive linguistic bibliography. While tension between the evangelical and scientific goals of the organization have manifested from time to time internally, as some members insist that linguistic expertise and publication come before evangelism while others resist, it is for outsiders that SIL's dual identity has tended to cause the most difficulties (Svelmoe 2008). Ironically, as this paper demonstrates, linguists in the United States, Mexico, and Latin America have themselves to blame and credit, almost as much as SIL itself, for the eventual shape of the organization.

1. WILLIAM CAMERON TOWNSEND AND SCRIPTURE TRANSLATION. SIL's founder, William Cameron Townsend (1896–1984), was an accidental missionary.[1] He went to college intending to follow his mother's wishes and become a preacher, but he found his studies boring and his fellow ministers-in-training dull. He attended a meeting of the Student Volunteer Movement, a popular turn-of-the-century college missionary organization, thinking that they 'had more fun'. He did not anticipate, when he perfunctorily signed the Student Volunteer pledge card vowing to seriously consider overseas mission work, that two years later he would be dropping out of college to sell Spanish-language Bibles in Guatemala. Once in Guatemala, however, Townsend became an accidental linguist. He originally intended to spend just one year there, dodging college

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[1] General narrative information throughout is taken from Svelmoe 2008.

and a ministerial future. He planned to work with the Spanish-speaking mestizo majority (known at the time as 'ladinos'), not the Indians with what he saw as dozens of strange and complicated languages. But as he traveled the back roads of Guatemala, he fell in love with the Indians, and he determined to spend his life helping them. 'It is apparent', he observed in his diary, 'that the Indian is Guatemala's beast of burden' (WCTP: Townsend Journal 10/17/1917).[2] At first his vision was expansive—schools, hospitals, orphanages—but his commitment to communicating with the native peoples in their own tongue soon drove him to focus on language study and Bible translation. From his fifteen years in Guatemala sprang Townsend's lifelong passion, which ultimately became SIL's mission: to find a way to communicate the Scriptures to every member of every people group in the world. To do this effectively, Townsend discovered (often to his own chagrin), missionaries would be required to undergo more serious academic training than they ever had before.

When Townsend first went to Guatemala in 1917 with the Central American Mission (CAM), he had three years of college under his belt. This immediately set him apart from most early-twentieth-century evangelical Protestant missionaries. The 'faith missions' that came to dominate the Protestant mission enterprise in the twentieth century, along with their supporting agencies (chiefly Bible institutes), were founded in order to quickly prepare devoted individuals for evangelistic service, regardless of their educational background. Many recruits had not even finished high school. This light educational attainment was fine with faith-mission leaders because what the prospective missionaries lacked in formal education, they more than made up for in piety and devotion to the mission project.[3] Years of college and seminary were not required to tell the simple gospel story to souls perceived as lost. Linguistic and anthropological training was therefore virtually nonexistent for prospective missionaries. As the Africa Inland Mission's own historian records, in the early years missionaries were 'deliberately chosen . . . for their zeal and godliness rather than their schooling and skills; so they could boast few linguistic talents' (Anderson 1994).

But the difficulty of learning indigenous languages had long been a roadblock to mission work with indigenous groups. Missionaries worked in the local lingua franca. Few were willing to spend the time required to learn Indian languages, and few missions would support such work even if willing missionaries were found. Townsend reported in 1921 that of the forty missionaries working in Guatemala only he and his wife were ministering full time in an Indian language (WCTP: Townsend/Kennedy 1/5/1921, #00804). The standard solution to the missions' 'Indian problem' at that time was simply to assimilate the Indians into the Spanish-speaking population, an approach that resonated well with the agenda of most Latin American governments. Townsend, however, became convinced that missionaries must learn Indian languages not only in order to conduct their ministry more effectively, but also in order to validate Indian cultures. He saw these as denigrated when Indians came into contact with the dominant Spanish-speaking ladino culture. Language learning and Bible translation thus became central to what Townsend felt was his calling.

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[2] Manuscript sources for quotations in this paper are as follows: AIMC: African Inland Mission Collection; Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL; WCTP: William Cameron Townsend Papers; Townsend Archives, Waxhaw, NC; references are to document number.

[3] The manual of the Africa Inland Mission, for example, recorded that 'members of the Mission are accepted because of their desire and ability to win souls above all other requisites, and all else is secondary' (AIMC: *AIM Mission Manual*, no. 81, 10–11, p. 16).

As Townsend began to conduct translation work he found himself interacting increasingly with secular academics. This was a circle in which faith missionaries rarely moved at that time, but the task of translation naturally drew Townsend into conversation with linguists and anthropologists. For example, he met with Edward Sapir in 1930, then at the University of Chicago, to discuss what alphabet to use in his Cakchiquel New Testament. The interest these associations aroused in him led to SIL's current academic focus.

After completing a Cakchiquel New Testament, grammar, and dictionary, Townsend left the CAM and conceived SIL in Mexico, complete with a stateside school to train missionaries to create written languages where none existed and then use them to translate the Scriptures. The first Camp Wycliffe, as Townsend called his summer school, began on June 7, 1934, in Arkansas. Two students attended that first summer. Despite its humble beginnings, Townsend's ambition was clear from the start. He described his plan of action as follows:

> Linguists, as a whole, do not hold the work done by missionaries on the different languages in very high repute. It seems to me that this situation should and could be remedied. Why should not missionaries do a more scientific piece of work than the linguists themselves, inasmuch as we are dealing with God's word? Of course, this is generally impossible, unless very special training is given to the Bible translators. We intend to build up a linguistic institute here which will be second to none as regards the practical phase of linguistic research, to serve missionary linguists. (WCTP: Townsend/North, 9/15/1937, #02094)

2. KEN PIKE AND THE INFLUENCE ON SIL OF US ACADEMICS. Townsend had no real idea what such training would require until he met Ken Pike. Pike hitchhiked his way to Camp Wycliffe in the summer of 1935. He quickly proved to be a rugged fieldworker and an extremely talented linguist. After just one summer of Townsend's rudimentary training, Pike set out to analyze one of Mexico's indigenous languages. He immediately recognized his need for more education. And so, alone, deep in the heart of Mixteco country, he ordered linguistics books, trained himself in linguistic methods, and applied this knowledge to his work. Pike understood almost immediately—and attempted to resolve—the tensions among Mexican politics, missionary evangelism, Bible translation, and academic linguistics. He wrote to his mother:

> Townsend has his plan of action here in Mexico upon the basis of scientific research for and with the government. In the bargain we will of course plan to do the translating which is our goal. But we do not want to masquerade as linguists and be anything else but that. The only answer then is to become linguists, in fact, not theory, and deliver the real goods. (WCTP: Pike/mom 1/14/1937, #02266)

In addition, at Townsend's urging, Pike began investigating where he could get advanced training in phonetics and grammar as it pertained to Indian languages. In the summer of 1937 Pike attended a special Linguistic Institute sponsored by the University of Michigan which featured Sapir (then at Yale), Leonard Bloomfield (whose book *Language* Pike had 'memorized'), and other prominent American linguists. Impressed by his work, Charles Fries, director of the Institute and professor at Michigan, invited him to enroll in the university's graduate program, and so he did. Pike went on to receive his Ph.D. in linguistics from Michigan in 1942 and returned there as a professor from 1948 to 1977, during which time he built SIL into the most important agency of descriptive linguistics in the world.

After Pike's matriculation at the University of Michigan, something of a pipeline developed between it and SIL. The University gave scholarships to SIL's best graduates to follow in Pike's footsteps and attend the Linguistic Institute summer sessions because

they knew the SIL students would put what they learned to practical use. Fries, Bloomfield, Sapir (who died early in 1939), and Morris Swadesh all supported at least the scientific aspect of SIL's work. As Edgar Sturtevant (then at Yale) said to Pike, 'Of course none of us are interested in the religious phase of your work, but we all are very much so in the linguistics part'. Pike felt pressure from these scholars to make sure SIL made a genuine linguistic contribution. As he remarked to his parents early on, 'We and our group have become definitely earmarked as being in the missionary business. Now we have to deliver the goods, or the Lord's name will surely be brought into reproach' (WCTP: Pike/folks 7/14/1938, #02403).

Townsend, however, had not waited for Pike to even begin his Ph.D. program before placing him in charge of his summer institute. He recognized Pike's natural aptitude for linguistics from the beginning, and his own desire was to remain in Mexico. Pike therefore ran Townsend's training camp in Arkansas together with Eugene Nida (who joined SIL in 1936 and later pioneered the translation theory of 'dynamic equivalence' (Nida & Taber 2003)), while Townsend managed affairs in Mexico and later Latin America. Problems developed, however, when Townsend's old-school sense of evangelistic urgency clashed with Pike and Nida's academic sensibilities. Townsend found it hard to fully support the reforms his own goals had unleashed. He remained at heart a faith missionary, one for whom linguistic training would always remain secondary to the goal of winning converts. Townsend intended Camp Wycliffe to steer mission recruits toward Indian communities, and to give them a few tools to assist with indigenous language learning and Bible translation. Townsend sought scientific legitimacy, but he valued it more as a stamp of approval for his organization than for its own sake. But for Pike and Nida, who had their feet in both academic and missionary communities on a day-to-day basis, the issue was much more complex. They would devote their lives to mission work, but not at the expense of illegitimacy in the academic world. They were committed to both mission work and academic linguistics at the same time.

By the time Pike finished his first summer at the University of Michigan's Linguistic Institute in September 1937, only three years after SIL's founding, Camp Wycliffe was in an uproar. The students could not keep up with the demands placed upon them by the faculty. Two students had decided to quit and others refused to recommend the program to their friends. The strain of turning prospective missionaries into linguists was beginning to show. Nida had instituted a grading system based on college standards rather than those normally used by Bible institutes, and grades were very low. Townsend was upset over this turn of events, but whether Townsend agreed with it or not, a new standard had been set. The goal of the emerging institution was not simply to rubberstamp whomever God happened to send along. And while the bar could be lowered, doing so would have meant abandoning Townsend's vision. Without its rigorous linguistic training, SIL would be just another mission, with only pretensions toward serious scholarship. Their Bible translations would be second-rate, and SIL linguists would never provide any work of note to the academy. Leonard Legters, who ran the recruiting arm of the new mission, saw the inevitable direction SIL would turn in before Townsend did. He refused to encourage applicants he felt were inadequately prepared. But it was difficult at the time to find qualified recruits from the typical evangelical constituency, since very few people in that population attended college. After one recruiting trip Legters reported to Townsend, 'There were a number of men at the [Moody Bible Institute] who spoke to me about Camp, men who had not had high school. I did not encourage them' (WCTP: Legters/Townsend 1/3/1938, #02369). Pike likewise discour-

aged a fair number of potential recruits. He reasoned that they would not be able to complete the work satisfactorily 'except with exceptional application and rare native ability' (WCTP: Pike/Townsend 7/19/1943, unnumbered).

The organization received an enormous boost from the academy in 1941 when the University of Oklahoma at Norman invited SIL to begin holding its summer sessions on its campus. Della Brunsteter, a faculty member at Oklahoma, attended Camp Wycliffe in Arkansas after meeting Pike at Michigan, and she was so impressed that she insisted the University extend the invitation. Townsend was initially reluctant because of the ramifications of moving the operation to a major secular university. 'We are very hesitant . . . about going to the University', he reported, 'and are only considering it because they have been so insistent that we begin to think that perhaps God has a purpose in it' (WCTP: Townsend/Pioneer Mission Agency 9/10/1941, #902724). Eventually SIL negotiated three hundred hours of teaching for University of Oklahoma students in exchange for access to housing, dining, and classroom facilities, along with college credit for those SIL students 'of collegiate standing'. The University offered to provide program publicity as well, and in doing so raised the delicate problem of how to explain the relationship between the secular university and the missionary organization. SIL seems to have worried about this more than the University did, however, and in 1949 the University of Oklahoma asked to be explicitly named in SIL's publications. 'It is my understanding that this has not been done in the past because you have felt that it would be presumptuous on your part', the president of the University wrote to Pike. 'May I assure you that the University would be only too pleased and would be highly honored to have its name associated with your scholarly publications' (WCTP: Cross/ Pike 10/1/1949, #43000).

That first summer at the University of Oklahoma, SIL's student body more than doubled. One hundred and thirty students attended the first Oklahoma Camp Wycliffe. The high profile move to a university campus, the closing of many missionary fields due to World War II and the consequent number of missionaries forced to remain at home, and Townsend's constant promotion of the institute for a decade combined to produce an explosive growth.

3. THE INFLUENCE ON SIL OF FOREIGN ACADEMICS. The Mexicans also had responsibility for giving shape to the new mission. They took Townsend at his word when he described his goals as linguistic, and they employed SIL in pursuit of their own interests. Mexican linguists, anthropologists, educators, and government officials knew the location of every SIL translator within Mexico's borders, and they expected results that would be beneficial to the country, as well as to SIL. Mexican academics were eager to enlist SIL's help in investigating their numerous Indian languages. Townsend, Pike, and others taught courses at the Mexican National University. A Mexican linguistic society, the Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Lingüísticas (IMIL), and the Mexican Ministry of Education requested that SIL prepare primers to be used in schools to teach the Indians to read and write in their own languages. SIL assisted the government with Indian literacy campaigns and translated President Cárdenas's speeches so that they could be addressed to indigenous groups in their vernaculars. SIL and IMIL cosponsored linguistic conferences and jointly published several linguistic journals. All these activities occurred in just the first decade of SIL's existence in Mexico.

Men like Pike, Townsend, and Nida felt pressure from American and Mexican academics to produce solid academic work. This was reflected in the pressure to publish or perish they put on their recruits. If SIL had been founded in a country with a less

interested or less developed academy, it may quickly have devoted itself entirely to Bible translation and neglected serious linguistics. But as it was, SIL's leaders often pushed new recruits hard, often literally forcing them to produce linguistic analyses and articles for dissemination in both the Mexican and American academic spheres. Most early recruits, even after graduation from Camp Wycliffe, had dreams of converts, rather than grammatical analyses, dancing in their heads. It was not for several generations, with the development of a more educated evangelical constituency in the United States, that recruits with an interest in linguistics for its own sake began to find their way to SIL.

As SIL's reputation grew throughout Latin America, the organization began to receive overtures from other countries. These usually came from a country's Department of Education or Department of Indigenous Affairs, which often had close connections to national universities, and which needed help incorporating indigenous communities into the broader life of the country. What this project required—learning indigenous languages, creating alphabets, teaching reading and other educational basics, serving as reliable intermediaries between governments and indigenous groups—meant years, if not decades, of what was often grueling work. Since national academics were generally unwilling to spend years of their lives in the field, SIL provided a desperately needed service at no cost, an offer few government administrators could refuse.

Townsend found that if SIL upheld its end of the bargain by providing indigenous language grammars, dictionaries, and literacy aids, government officials tended to look benignly on Bible translation. The carefully worded contracts SIL negotiated with Latin American countries and the dual identity of SIL and its funding and recruiting arm, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, have led some critics to claim that SIL deceived Latin American countries into allowing them entry by posing as linguistic scientists when they were in fact missionaries (Stoll 1982). But this critique takes a very dim view of the intelligence of Latin American government officials. These men were not dupes. In Latin America invitations were generally not solicited by SIL, but were rather initiated by national governments that were attracted by the quality of SIL's scientific work and that were fully aware of its intention to translate the Bible into Indian languages. SIL was a high-profile North American institution, and most governments researched it thoroughly before extending an invitation. Countries such as Brazil even sent officials to neighboring countries to check on SIL's work.

The downplaying of Bible translation in the wording of SIL contracts often took its impetus from concerns internal to Latin American government circles, rather than from SIL itself. Catholic countries simply could not afford the risk of a public contract that explicitly outlined the group's Protestant intent. Peru provides a good example of this. The Catholic Church was not in disfavor in Peru, as it was in revolutionary Mexico where SIL started out. It was recognized as the official Church of the country and was protected accordingly. The vast majority of government officials were Catholic, and the Church exercised a great deal of influence over them. Even while he was negotiating with SIL in 1945, Peruvian president Manuel Prado canceled all Protestant propaganda among the indigenous groups in Peru, saying, 'The Constitution protects the Catholic religion. The nation spends large sums for the development of Catholic missions . . . and their activities should not be vitiated by diverse forms of religious propaganda' (Considine 1958:254). The secretary of the Mexican Bible Society warned Townsend that SIL would be 'walking a tightrope' in Peru, trying to achieve its own and the Peruvian government's goals for indigenous groups without bringing down the wrath of the Church on them both (WCTP: Townsend/Church 2/8/1947, #04763). Latin Amer-

ican government agencies knew that they had to downplay the organization's missionary intent if they were to get their contracts with SIL ratified at home. In short, they went into the relationship with their eyes open, and were willing to accept SIL's mission agenda as perhaps unwelcome baggage that was offset by what they stood to gain from SIL's scientific expertise.

4. SIL TODAY. After Mexico (1935) and Peru (1945), SIL entered Guatemala in 1952, Ecuador and the Philippines in 1953, Bolivia in 1955, then Colombia, Brazil, and Indonesia in rapid succession. Today SIL linguists operate in more than ninety countries around the world. The mission, one of the largest in the world, now includes approximately 6,500 members and recently celebrated the completion of its five hundredth translation of the New Testament. Work is ongoing in over 1,100 other languages. Townsend's peculiar hybrid organization has become entrenched within, and quite possibly essential to, the academic linguistic enterprise. Early in SIL's history, American, Mexican, and Latin American linguists and other academics supported SIL, training its linguists, facilitating entrée to their countries, and demanding that it live up to its own commitments as a scientific organization. In return, SIL has provided linguists with mountains of data on languages that would otherwise have remained undocumented, as well as expertise in any number of other areas, from anthropology to technology. SIL's centrality in the contemporary linguistics scene cannot be understood without reference to this long history of collaboration and influence.

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Language ideologies, endangered-language linguistics, and Christianization*

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Language ideologies generally refer to the kinds of cultural assumptions or beliefs that speakers hold about their OWN language: its relation to the world, its relation to their sense of self, its relation to other languages, and so forth (Silverstein 1979, Woolard 1998). But in the kinds of cross-cultural contact situations that linguists, anthropologists, missionaries, or other Christian aid workers often find themselves, language ideologies about OTHER peoples' languages can be just as important. Though cultural assumptions about language may change over time and across historical and social contexts, they never disappear, not even from professional linguistics. Here I look at some of the key language ideologies at issue when considering the relationship between SIL and endangered-language linguistics.

In order to do an analysis of the kinds of situations in which groups like SIL operate, several language ideologies need to be taken into account. First, there are those of the local communities with which SIL works. Local, non-Western communities often have very different assumptions from Westerners (and Western conservative Christians) about language and its relation to the world, to people and their interior states, or to other languages. These ideologies can become particularly important in moments of historical transformation, such as Christian conversion, when the assumptions of local communities are put in conversation with those of the new institution, in this case Christian theology and belief. Second, we need to look at the language ideologies of SIL, including translators, literacy specialists, trainers, administrators, and so on. Given the complex organizational constitution of SIL, the wide geographic spread of its work, and the variability among its members, this is a daunting task to say the least. Finally, in the context of this set of papers it is also important to think about the kinds of language ideologies that inform the research and ethics of endangered-language linguistics.

In 1927, Edward Sapir, Franz Boas, and Leonard Bloomfield established the Committee on Research in Native American Languages to support and fund research in the then-nascent field of Americanist linguistics. At the time, they argued about which researchers to fund for work aimed at salvaging as much linguistic data as possible before Native North American Indian languages died off. In this debate, Sapir argued that missionaries could do the job as well as 'scientific' linguists could so long as the former had 'good ears' (Leeds-Hurwitz 1985, Murray 1991:3, n. 6). Boas and Bloomfield won the argument, though, and missionaries were excluded. I bring up this story in order to highlight the major change in linguists' orientations to their fieldwork and the understanding of their goals. Currently, linguists working with endangered languages are trying to do more than just salvage data before speakers die out. As the endangered-languages literature puts it (Abley 2003, Crystal 2000, Harrison 2007, Nettle & Romaine 2000), languages are part of a speaker's worldview and embody values and knowledge specific to a speaker's community. Using this sense of the language-worldview connection that is found in the endangered-languages literature, UNESCO is currently trying to unify and organize an official international stance and set of policy suggestions on endangered languages.[1] For UNESCO, language is part of the intangible heritage of minority communities, and humanity would be poorer for the lack of diversity that would be represented by the loss of the language. Linguists are no longer just saving data as in Boas's and Sapir's day; they also see themselves as helping to sustain speakers and their communities. This too is an ideology of language, one in which language represents something more than just structure. Rather, language embodies an outlook on the world that is also connected to the other facets of 'intangible heritage' that UNESCO identifies: performing arts, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship. In this language ideology, language is not just a denotational code; it has become a part of identity and identity politics, and linguists or missionaries with 'good ears' are no longer enough. Instead, if Sapir were to make his argument today to UNESCO he would have to say that missionaries would support, or at least not hinder the continuation of, the endangered language as well as the entire gamut of intangible-heritage identity practices.

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[1] http://www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages; http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/, last accessed August 13, 2009.

It is not new to try to connect language to identity, and in fact it is a part of the Christian missionizing tradition. Colonial/missionary linguists did this often in places ike Africa, where stable identities were mapped onto denotational codes by inventing or tweaking histories of migration and cultural heritage for the speakers of these languages. That is to say, languages seemed more like the languages of Europe (i.e. backed by standardizing practices of dictionary production or backed by government institutions like the Académie française) when ethnic histories and identities could be given to them, and missionaries sometimes played with the facts in order to give a language a stable and enduring identity and population with which to associate (see Errington 2001, Harries 1987, Irvine 1993, Pennycook & Makoni 2005, Ranger 1983, among others). On the one hand, then, the ways in which linguists are now recognizing the connection between language and identity is familiar from the colonial and mission history. On the other hand, the fact that speakers are now understood to have inalienable rights to their language and intangible heritage is a product of the recent expansion of recognized human rights (see Nettle & Romaine 2000:193). Although couched now in a UNESCO-inflected language of rights and freedom, this language ideology can be just as burdensome as colonial language ideologies, particularly by insisting that local people maintain their languages in order to be 'authentic' members of an ethnolinguistic community.

SIL language ideologies about the connection between language and identity are complex (Handman 2007). Of the many goals that SIL members set for themselves, they are particularly concerned to develop a sense of self-esteem among local language speakers through a general focus on language development. This sense of self-esteem will in part come from the language itself, which will be a local source of continuity in a changing environment. Not just any local language: SIL and other translation organizations' materials specifically focus on the mother tongue, or 'heart language' as it was once called (see Cowan 1979). A speaker's first, native language holds a special place in Christian translation literature, as the language in which the Scriptures and other materials can best be understood by receptor communities. Heart languages are understood as repositories of the kind of sincere, intentional, and truthful language that Robbins (2001) and Keane (1997) in particular have identified with Christian missionization. The mother tongue will also help speakers to maintain their community identity through periods of transition. As George Cowan, former president of Wycliffe USA wrote, mother tongue identification 'gives continuity to life, linking the present generation to past generations from whom the language was learned and with future generations now acquiring it. A translation of the Bible and native-authored writings in the mother tongue enter the stream of the group's cultural heritage' (Cowan 1979:63).

For those who opt for Christian conversion, SIL sees two possible sources of identity: one from language and another from Christianity, although the ultimate goal is for Christianity to seem as indigenous as the local language (see Sanneh 1989). This is a major difference between SIL and holders of endangered-language ideologies. In contrast to the ways in which UNESCO assumes that intangible heritage would necessarily all come from the same source, SIL materials suggest that speakers have an indelible relation to language and linguistic identity, but a choice in religious or cultural identity. Where SIL language ideology separates linguistic identity from other forms of identity, UNESCO's characterization of intangible heritage rhetorically assumes a uniform set

of traits and practices, which are from the same source and all of which are indelibly linked to a speaker. In other words, UNESCO does NOT aim to protect the rights of someone who speaks a Papua New Guinean language, holds African festivals and rites, asses on knowledge of Polynesian astronomy, and makes handicrafts from Southeast Asia, since that does not seem to be coherent.[2] But SIL seems to say otherwise: that local language identity and imported Christian identity can be coherent, and can be coherently meshed (for more on this issue, see for example Sanneh 1989). Both language ideologies impose a number of burdens on local speakers in efforts to effect social change: UNESCO in its attempts to insist on cultural homogeneity, SIL in its attempt to produce Christian religious adherence.

How then do local people take up these multiple forms of identity—with linguistic identity coming from the local situation and religious identity coming from the outside? Can they? In the Waria Valley of Papua New Guinea, where I conducted fieldwork among Guhu-Samane communities, the question of how to take up these different kinds of identity was very fraught. After a 1975 New Testament translation by an SIL team and after a subsequent Holy Spirit revival, two homegrown Pentecostal churches emerged. Both churches work to maintain the local language, but one tries to separate out language identity from cultural heritage and the other tries to combine them. Members of the first church have tried to give up on the kinds of intangible heritage that UNESCO discusses. For example, traditional dancing is frowned upon, and the drums used in traditional dancing cannot be used to accompany Christian songs in church services. The other church, however, works to find some kind of melding of the two identities that they now have—what UNESCO would identify as their traditional intangible heritage as well as their Christian belief—by using traditional dance and drumming in church events and attempting to combine local mythical knowledge with Christian theology. Both churches have come out of the exact same Lutheran and then SIL environment, and yet have come to radically different conclusions about how to understand the relationship between their local linguistic identity and their cultural or Christian identity.

While the Guhu-Samane have taken this issue to an extreme, forming distinct churches and (in some cases) distinct villages around their answer to the language and identity question, other local communities that have turned to Christianity, through SIL or other organizations, have had to grapple with similar problems. At an Apache reservation in the US an SIL-sponsored 'language expert' has created a corpus of language materials and a genre of speaking that is, as Samuels (2006) notes, disconnected from the traditional contexts and performances of Apache culture. Language experts in Biak, Indonesia, maintain their work in semi-secrecy, separating the Christian language materials from the rest of the local markers of identity (Rutherford 2000). The introduction of literacy during a non-SIL translation project among the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea has brought many changes (Schieffelin 2000). While several young men were able to become pastors and literacy teachers, for most of the rest of the community, people began to see written language as something disconnected from them, in which they were just passive recipients of knowledge (see also Knauft 2002). As Grenoble and Whaley discuss (2005:969–70), literacy can also disconnect speakers from their language by giving them the skills to engage with national languages, even

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[2] The burdensome ways in which such requirements of coherence affect local populations attempting to gain political rights or recognition from the state is discussed in Povinelli 2002.

though the language ideologies of those working to support endangered languages intend for literacy to be a tool for minority-language preservation.

In the kinds of minority and rural communities where SIL and other Christian groups such as New Tribes Mission or Pioneer Bible Translators often work, the relationship between language and identity under Christianization is rarely stable. Even when local people are deeply committed to being Christian, they may find that their local language ideologies may be in conflict with Christian beliefs. Many researchers have noted the deep connection between prayer and intentionality in Protestant Christianity, where what people say is supposed to mirror their soul and their innermost beliefs. Crapanzano (2000), Harding (2000), and Shoaps (2002) have discussed this for Western Christian groups, who use particular linguistic performance cues such as breathy voice quality, nonarchaic speech, and heavy use of spatial and temporal deixis to mark their impromptu prayers as sincere and intentional. As this and other research has shown (see Du Bois 1992, Duranti 1992), the connection between speech and intentionality that is assumed in Western contexts is actually a product of cultural performance, not a natural fact of speaking. Keane (1997), Robbins (2001), and Schieffelin (2007) have all shown that in the non-Western communities in which they studied, postconversion attempts to create a Christian connection between speech and intentionality have been partially successful at best. For example, the Urapmin people of Papua New Guinea, who prior to conversion did not tie speech and intentionality, have tried to fit their ideas of language use with their knowledge of Christian belief through rituals of prayer (Robbins 2001). Even if PEOPLE cannot know the intentions of others, they reason, GOD surely can, and so listening to what people say in prayer is probably a good way of figuring out what they are thinking and feeling, since they would not want to lie to God. In that sense, Urapmin are able to take on the Christian language ideology in which language is truthful, intentional, and sincere, but only insofar as they become ratified 'overhearers', in Goffman's (1981) terms, as opposed to direct addressees.

Each social group in particular places and times has language ideologies specific to it, and I have tried to demonstrate the ways in which the new moral stance of endangered-language linguistics, put into official terms of policy recommendations in the UNESCO materials, contrasts with that of Christian groups such as SIL. As language ideologies that are projected onto other communities, both of these impose assumptions about speakers, their rights, and their communities that local people themselves might not agree with. I have also tried to show the ways in which language ideologies of specific local communities come into conflict with Christian beliefs and tenets, and the ways that local people try to reconcile these conflicts. There is no way to predict how a particular group will react—in the Guhu-Samane area two local churches coming from the same context have come to different answers about how to connect language and identity. Instead, we need to study Christianization and its language effects as historical processes that are specific to each community. And we need to have better analyses of groups like SIL, as well as analyses of the language ideologies that inform professional endangered-language linguistics, that move beyond stereotypes and into local contexts of intercultural communication.

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Syntax, souls, or speakers? On SIL and community language development*

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1. INTRODUCTION. Commentators on the Christian missionary organization SIL International have long noted the organization's bipartite structure, which embraces both evangelism and linguistic science. These seemingly dissociate goals are mutually reinforcing, with SIL's linguistic work contributing to its evangelical aims and vice versa. This paper focuses on a third, equally important, component of SIL's work that academic linguists tend to overlook: community development. We argue that although this kind of work evidences a concern for speaker welfare, it also conceals an incompatibility with the principle of self-determination, the idea that communities have a right to freely choose their own futures. Despite a rhetorical commitment to the latter ideal, the practical effects of SIL involvement are closely aligned with the forces of politically and economically dominant societies that confront and overwhelm local indigenous societies and their languages.

2. SIL: ONE SHIP, DIFFERENT FLAGS. Supporters and critics alike agree that SIL is a complex organization. While SIL proper is explicitly engaged in linguistic pursuits (see www.sil.org), it is also the twin of Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT), which has as its goal 'to bear fruit among new believers who also become rooted in God's Word', primarily through Bible translation (www.wycliffe.org). To insiders, who belong to both groups, SIL/WBT is simply, in the words of a member (in personal communication), 'one ship that flies different flags'. But to outsiders, the 'shifting presentation between a SIL and a WBT ''context'' or ''emphasis'' ' can appear duplicitous (Stoll 1981:23), and this has made SIL's organizational structure the target of a number of scathing critiques (e.g. Hvalkof & Aaby 1981a, Stoll 1981, 1982). In fact, however, the organization's structural complexity goes well beyond these two principal faces; its wide umbrella subsumes a whole range of other associated groups, such as JAARS (originally 'Jungle Aviation and Radio Service', providers of technical and transportation-related services to SIL/WBT members and their associates), The Seed Company (a US-based Bible translation group), and related organizations worldwide (the Associação Lingüística Evangélica Missionária (ALEM) in Brazil, the Bible Translation Association (BTA) in Papua New Guinea, and many others).[1]

This apparent organizational complexity resolves when we shift our focus from SIL's structure to its functions.[2] Despite its many faces, SIL can be best understood as a single institution with three different functions: evangelism, linguistic research, and community development. Alongside its evangelical and linguistic components, SIL's development component primarily stresses literacy and education projects, but also

[1] SIL's branches in various countries are also incorporated separately; these include such groups as SIL in Brazil, defined in Portuguese as the 'International Society of Linguistics in Brazil' (see http://www.sil.org/americas/brasil/PortHome.htm).

[2] Henceforth, we use 'SIL' as a cover term for the package of closely associated suborganizations dedicated to Bible translation, which include SIL International, Wycliffe Bible Translators, JAARS, and so forth.

includes sponsorship of medical clinics, agricultural programs, village well installations, and other such humanitarian endeavors (e.g. Alford 2005, Cahill 2000, Mann 1995).

SIL's three functions are unified by the organization's primary purpose: in the words of a *Christianity Today* journalist, this is 'fulfilling the Great Commission, [the Biblical mandate] to make disciples of all nations, [by providing] Scriptures in the heart languages of people groups that don't have a translation of the Bible' (Alford 2005:1). It is this unifying goal that enables the organization to fund its activities,[3] and it is clearly this that has motivated thousands of people to spend decades of their lives in remote communities, engaged in the task of translation.[4] Thus, while there is a degree of independence among SIL's functions, each can only be fully evaluated with reference to this larger purpose.

It is SIL's scientific function that aligns it most closely with academic linguistics. Linguists make use of SIL's software and descriptive data; for its part, SIL gains the linguistic tools necessary for competent Bible translation,[5] as well as academic credentials and a secular identity that help the organization to open political doors. But because SIL's scientific priorities are determined by the ultimate evangelical purpose described above, they contrast with those of academic linguistics on several counts. The documentation of moribund languages is of low priority for SIL, and the urgency of SIL's 'Vision 2025' ('to see Bible translation begun by 2025 in every remaining language community that needs it'[6]) stresses speed, potentially at the price of thoroughness, in training, documentation, and analysis (cf. Guthrie 2005). The goal of rapidly translating key nonnative texts also necessarily limits the time fieldworkers have to spend on language materials of native content—the backbone of language documentation.

While SIL's scientific function is the one most visible to academic linguists, it is the community-development function that plays the greatest role in the organization's success in minority-language communities. SIL's projects are frequently welcomed by local people, independently of—or in spite of—their spiritual interests. Not only do many such projects provide needed humanitarian aid (see Cahill 2000), but other features of development that may be attractive to local people come as the byproducts of a missionary presence. These include regular boat or plane transport, access to medicines and trade goods, and a feeling of empowerment or self-worth that derives from recognition by the outside world (see, for example, Dobrin 2008). SIL's development projects are likewise viewed positively by many national governments. Even when governments do not embrace the organization's evangelical agenda, they welcome the aid SIL provides (e.g. Hefley & Hefley 1972, Rus & Wasserstrom 1981). Governments

[3] SIL International reported over $41,000,000 in revenue on its 2005 tax return. Almost all of these funds are provided by Christian supporters of the Bible translation mission.

[4] As evidence, one need only consider the output of many SIL members. While the degree of interest in linguistics naturally varies from one individual to the next, a typical result of decades of work is a translation of large portions of the Bible and a handful of linguistic publications. The material on the Cacua language of the Colombian Amazon is a case in point: since 1965, SIL linguist Marilyn Cathcart has produced a full translation of the New Testament (together with Lois Lowers and Cacua speakers, completed in 2005), as well as a significant portion of the Old Testament, but only four article-length academic publications on the language (Cathcart 1973, 1979, Cathcart & Levinsohn 1976, 1977). In other words, despite more than forty years of work on it, the Cacua language remains virtually undescribed in published sources.

[5] SIL's founder, W. Cameron Townsend, put it this way: 'You must be able to analyze these languages, master them, and make them bear God's message in an accurate way. Why, if you use the wrong verb form, the Indians say ''Why, what is wrong with God? He can't talk our language right. He blunders'' ' (Townsend 1960).

[6] From http://www.wycliffe.net/v2025.shtml, retrieved July 2006.

are also aware that linguistic surveys and literacy programs bring peripheral peoples further into the state's sphere of influence (Errington 2001, 2008, Hemming 2003). Government appreciation for SIL's development work continues to gain the organization access to regions where overt missionary activity would not be tolerated, such as Muslim regions of Africa and South Asia.

Despite its worldly appeal, SIL's community-development work is closely linked to its evangelical goals and accompanying worldview. SIL's focus on literacy and education is in large part a reflection of its aim to create a readership for its Bibles. But like many Western-led development projects, SIL's community-development work tends to carry over ancillary assumptions about family, economy, and personal habits that derive from the developers' own culture. So, for example, the literacy books prepared by SIL for the Nadëb people of the Brazilian Amazon place 'an emphasis on family values, cleanliness, monogamy, sobriety . . . they talk a great deal about the value of work, about the idea that nothing is free' (Vianna 2007:29, quoting anthropologist Ernesto Belo; our translation). SIL community projects tend to rely on the economic logic of buying and selling, even where the local norm is delayed reciprocal giving or sharing. In Amazonia, SIL has also promoted farming and animal husbandry among nomadic hunters (e.g. Hefley & Hefley 1972, Mann 1995, Olson 1995).[7]

SIL's evangelical and development functions are so closely intertwined that the reasons behind a community's request for SIL involvement may not be obvious to outsiders. A major consideration guiding SIL's choice of communities in which to initiate projects is whether a group has requested a Scripture translation or a missionary presence. Such requests, however, can reflect a desire for more than just a Bible; as has been documented for peoples like the Achuar of Peru (Steel 1999) and the Balangao of the Philippines (Shetler & Purvis 1992:32–33), local people's solicitation of SIL involvement may be motivated primarily by a desire for trade goods and attention from the outside world. Missions themselves recognize this problem of 'rice Christians' (e.g. Culbertson 1987)—people whose conversion to Christianity is not genuine, but is made in order to get material benefits that come with it.

3. Community development and self-determination. While constrained by its evangelical purpose, SIL's community-development work nevertheless reflects missionaries' concern for speakers of minority languages. This same concern is growing stronger among academic linguists, as more of them undertake fieldwork in minority-language communities and recognize that the poverty and marginalization faced by many language communities is at the heart of the issue of language death (e.g. Dorian 1993, Hale 1992, Krauss 1992, Nettle & Romaine 2000). As Hale observes, 'language loss is a serious matter. Or, more accurately, it is part of a process which is itself very serious . . . in which politically dominant languages and cultures simply overwhelm indigenous local languages and cultures' (1992:1).

A consensus is growing among academic documentary linguists that working toward the well-being of speech communities is a part of truly ethical fieldwork (e.g. Cameron et al. 1992, Dwyer 2006, Hale & Hinton 2001, Rice 2006), and that linguists' work must embrace humanitarian as well as scientific aims. Yet academic linguists have been constrained in addressing communities' needs by the practical demands of university positions, the expectations of funding agencies, and the lack of a broader infrastructure

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[7] The emergence of these values in Western social history (as opposed to Biblical mandate) is amply documented. On cleanliness and the home, see Frykman & Löfgren 1987. Thompson 1967 is a classic study on the history of work discipline. On the cultural assumptions inherent in Western commodity exchange, see Sahlins 1972. On sedentarization, see Scott 1998.

to support them—whereas SIL's goal of evangelism fuels support both for language description and community-development work. Accordingly, some linguists have expressed appreciation for the fact that SIL has been there in their absence, undertaking language-development projects that they themselves have been unable or unwilling to shoulder (cf. Dixon & Aikhenvald 1999:2–3, Troike 2006).

It is widely agreed in the academic community that the key to assuring speaker welfare is self-determination (see, for example, Hinton 2001:5). Yet self-determination is a complex issue; communities normally represent a polyphony of voices and opinions, and decisions to adopt or resist change are virtually always made in response to pressure of some kind, whether mild, profound, internal, external, or some combination of these. Many of the choices of individuals and communities to give up a language, cultural practice, or religious belief in favor of another are motivated by pragmatic responses to other forces in their lives, and in many cases these choices seem sensible to insiders and outsiders alike. Considerations such as these motivated Ladefoged's (1992) evaluation of language loss—or rather, shift to a dominant variety—as a matter of free and informed choice, with which we as linguists have no right to interfere. As Dorian's (1993) response to Ladefoged points out, however, some choices are made more freely than others. Some pressures are more externally imposed and are less easily resisted than others, and a deep sense of loss and regret frequently accompanies language loss, just as a 'rising consciousness of cultural loss resulting from a colonial past or other historically disfavoring circumstances [affects] modern-day descendants' (Dorian 1993: 577). In other words, self-determination must include the freedom to dissociate profound cultural and linguistic choices from other choices relating to matters of material and psychological survival, particularly when these are imposed from outside.

The right to self-determination is held up as an ideal not only by many in today's academic world, but it is also explicit in the evangelical worldview, which maintains that accepting or denying Jesus Christ as one's savior must be a matter of free choice. SIL likewise promotes its community-development projects as contributing to indigenous peoples' capacity for self-determination vis-à-vis the national society (e.g. Fortune & Fortune 1987, Mann 1995, Olson 1995, SIL website: 'Community development'[8]). Yet SIL's approach to self-determination differs in important ways from that generally aspired to in the social activism of academic linguistics. Most importantly, Christianity is often not an isolable choice for many of those approached by missionaries, as requests like the Achuar's and the Balangao's illustrate. The decision to open one's community to missions is bound up almost inextricably with other choices, such as a closer association with the outside world and the socioeconomic opportunities this is expected to bring—an expectation reinforced for local people by the obvious relative wealth and power of the missionaries themselves (see e.g. Schieffelin 2002), whose boats, planes, and seemingly inexhaustible supplies of material goods go hand in hand with their religious identity. The choice to accept only one part of what is offered, while openly rejecting the other, is fraught with difficulties; it may be seen as socially inappropriate, ungrateful, or risky, in that offending those who provide assistance might cause that aid to be withdrawn. For many of these local communities, the decision to accept or reject the evangelical message is certainly far more complex and constrained than it is for urbane Americans and Europeans, for whom responding to evangelism primarily involves deciding what to say to a Jehovah's Witness on the doorstep.

The likelihood that the evangelical part of the package will not easily be turned down is further heightened by a widespread tendency among SIL members to foreground

[8] At http://www.sil.org/anthro/communitywork.htm, accessed April 2007.

and promote a spiritual message, despite the organization's statement that it discourages active proselytizing. The independence of individual SIL members in the field, coupled with their strong desire to 'bear fruit among new believers' (http://www.wycliffe.org, 2006; see also Hefley & Hefley 1972, Larson & Dodds 1985, Shetler & Purvis 1992), leads in many cases to activities that are clearly directed toward promoting a specific, Christian agenda, such as leading community-wide prayers and hymn sings, and teaching Scripture (e.g. Lake Avenue Church 2005, Shetler & Purvis 1992, Sollenberger 2001, Vallier 2003, Vianna 2007). The technological resources used in these activities are often a key part of their impact; for example, the realism of Bible videos such as the ubiquitous 'Jesus Film' (a portrayal of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection)[9] is particularly powerful among groups in Amazonia and other parts of the world who have little experience with electronic media, and who may be unaware that the events shown were staged and the people merely actors.

   A further consideration is the fact that evangelical success in a given community typically entails the displacement or transformation of the beliefs that preceded it, rather than simply adding to the existing cultural palette (e.g. Dowdy 1994:113, Larson & Dodds 1985:35). Moreover, in many cases the practices and beliefs of parents and grandparents are not simply lost, but actively repudiated (Schieffelin 2002, Smith 1981: 126); this often leads to social upheaval and factionalism, which may have devastating social consequences when the schism is abrupt and widespread within the group (e.g. Dowdy 1994:142, Hemming 2003:262).[10] This replacement and denigration of the old in favor of the new minimally involves ideas concerning a deity, an afterlife, and related matters, but it frequently also extends to other aspects of life that are more cultural than spiritual, such as attitudes toward work and leisure, male-female relationships, use of alcohol and tobacco (whether for ritual and recreation), personal modesty, economic transactions, and so forth (e.g. Calvet 1987, Hill 1990, Smith 1981, Stoll 1982). In the linguistic realm, genres of verbal art (and in some cases even whole linguistic codes) that are linked to traditional and/or ritual contexts are brought into question (e.g. Hale 1992, 1998), as are attitudes regarding bilingualism and the relative status of different languages or dialects (Pennycook & Makoni 2005). While SIL ostensibly changes the Bible to make it accessible to other cultures, it also promotes cultural change to fit the worldview taken for granted by those who bring it—and does so unavoidably, though the degree of change may vary considerably depending on the philosophies of the individuals concerned. As Joseph Errington (2007:220) observes, the cultural presuppositions of Bible translation make 'missionaries and pastors unknowing but effective shock troops of modernity'.[11]

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   [9] See http://www.jesusfilm.org.

   [10] Factionalism may likewise be created by the proliferation of religious choices within a community. Whereas in Western society choice is taken for granted as an intrinsic value—the more of it the better—for some groups religious choice may be held to be a divisive and disruptive force. In some coastal Arapesh villages of Papua New Guinea, for example, people believe that the presence of multiple churches is undermining to a village's well-being and unity (Lise Dobrin, p.c.).

   [11] Reports of profound cultural change brought about by SIL missionaries come from many parts of the world. Some of the most drastic are from Amazonia, where for a number of native groups SIL activity has led to the abandonment of traditional practices such as shamanism, natural healing, and native mythologies; has created dependencies on Western medicines and goods; and has produced factionalism between believers and unbelievers (see e.g. Dowdy 1994, 1995, Hefley & Hefley 1972, Hemming 2003, Hvalkof & Aaby 1981b, Larson & Dodds 1985, Smith 1981). Accounts such as these led to charges of 'ethnocide' leveled against SIL by a group of anthropologists in the 1970s (e.g. Moore 1979; cf. Olson, this collection).

The mission endeavor—which seeks to fulfill the 'Great Commission' by bringing (evangelical) Christianity to all people—is thus, we argue, irreconcilable with the principle of self-determination, because it brings about change according to terms largely determined outside the community itself. These cultural changes may in turn engender the deep feeling of loss in subsequent generations that Dorian (1993:577) describes, as evidenced in our experience by Amazonian Baniwa Indian boys' expression of regret that they would never experience the Yurupari ritual complex, which was replaced in their parents' and grandparents' time by evangelical Christianity. Furthermore, such cultural change is closely linked to the loss of linguistic styles, registers, genres, and varieties (e.g. Campbell & Muntzel 1989); Hale's (1992, 1998) eloquent description of the death of the Australian ritual language Damin (via missionaries' outlawing of the rituals with which it was associated) is a case in point. While externally imposed cultural change may indeed have many sources, linguistics' overlap with missions in the case of SIL makes it an area where we must focus some attention.

4. The challenge for academic linguistics. In contrast to SIL, which has carried out community development as one of its central functions since its founding, academic linguistics has only recently begun to adopt the position that it is irresponsible to single-mindedly address scientific goals to the exclusion of humanitarian ones. Ray Jackendoff (2007:260; see also England 1992, Wilkins 1992) challenges linguists to 'use what [they] know about language for social good', to consider the welfare of communities, and to support speakers' efforts to 'keep their culture and history and traditions alive against the overwhelming encroachments of dominant cultures and economic systems'. Unlike SIL, academic linguistics has no higher evangelical purpose that may contradict these aims. But also unlike SIL, academic linguistics currently lacks dedicated organizational structures that could assist in systematically addressing humanitarian concerns.

As our priorities shift, so must our practices. New and creative initiatives are already underway. There are new models of team-based, community-driven fieldwork, such as those developed by the NGO Cabeceras Aid Project and associated researchers, a group dedicated to both language documentation and humanitarian aid projects among indigenous peoples of the Amazon Basin (see www.cabeceras.org). These efforts are proving effective in pairing linguists with specialists in other fields and in the communities themselves, and in promoting the kinds of long-term community-based programs that are much harder to maintain using the traditional one-fieldworker-one-language approach. As such efforts multiply, they will provide models and even generate infrastructure to promote future efforts. Moreover, by becoming a more visible force for humanitarian goals, linguists will attract support from local, on-the-ground infrastructures (governments, NGOs, etc.) that currently throw their weight behind SIL—often because they are not aware that other options might exist. Such initiatives within academic linguistics would be greatly aided by the formation of an international linguistics think-tank or similar organization dedicated to issues at the interface of the discipline and society, which would represent a consistent and widely available resource for those seeking to partner linguistic and humanitarian goals. While the centralized, relatively unified infrastructure behind SIL's initiatives is probably not a realistic goal for academic linguistics, we submit that it is neither a necessary nor even a desirable one. Rather, the multiplicity of voices and opinions in the more distributed academic model will ultimately foster an open-minded, innovative approach to solving the problems

faced by linguists and by speakers, and one in which practical assistance to communities can come with relatively few strings attached.

Mark Liberman (2007) has observed that 'the world needs a field to solve its linguistic problems', but academic linguistics has done little to meet this need. SIL, by contrast, has undoubtedly provided solutions to a number of particular problems, but it also necessarily contributes to the more general problem: politically and economically dominant societies are overwhelming local indigenous ones. Academic linguists have both a moral and a professional interest in supporting speech communities' right to self-determination, given that healthy language communities provide material to inform theories of language (e.g. Hinton 2001:5). But these interests are fundamentally at odds with the field's current reliance on an organization with an evangelical agenda such as SIL's. Moreover, by ceding responsibility for humanitarian applications of linguistic (and other) expertise to SIL, academic linguists are in fact contributing to the promotion of SIL's evangelical goals, and thus—in many cases—to the compromising of communities' abilities to freely determine their own futures. Shouldering the responsibility for local language-development projects will certainly require new levels of creativity on the part of the academic linguistics community. Yet that would be a small price to pay for situating the field on a more justifiable foundation.

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SIL International: An emic view*

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1. INTRODUCTION. Recent concern among linguists about endangered languages has increased interest in fieldwork to document these languages. This in turn has brought a new generation of linguists into contact with the largest linguistic fieldwork organiza-

tion in the world, SIL International, and its primary partner organization Wycliffe Bible Translators.[1]

SIL can be an enigma. Historian Todd Hartch (2006:xvii) puts it this way in his published dissertation from Yale University:

> Clearly, the SIL is a strange organization. As a U.S.-based fundamentalist missions organization that works closely with radical and nationalist foreign governments, starts no churches, and focuses on the arcane science of linguistics, it simply has no peers.

SIL comprises evangelical[2] Christians (including a minority who are fundamentalist), yet surprising to some much of its work is scholarly. Having one foot in the Christian camp and the other in the scholarly camp has brought us criticism from both the missionary and the academic communities. Some missionaries believe we are not doing enough to evangelize, while some in the academy have concerns about our Christian composition and assumptions.

Because SIL does not readily fit into any preconceived categories, its goals have at times been misrepresented. Some have even attempted to discredit and marginalize the organization, resorting to logical fallacies. For example, based on his experience with a single indigenous group in Colombia, Arcand (1981:79) hastily generalizes, 'I consider myself in a privileged position to call a liar any SIL missionary claiming to respect indigenous cultures'. He also engages in an ad hominem attack: 'It is not known how many of these missionaries are considered backward, ugly farmers by other Americans' (1981:77). Robinson (1981:42) implies that SIL is involved in covert intelligence tasks by the irrelevant association that its former headquarters were in Southern California, where the far-right branch of the Republican Party happened to be strong. He also provides a non sequitur in discussing the cooperation between HCJB Radio, Mission Aviation Fellowship, and SIL in Ecuador (1981:49): '[J]ust why all this? So that God's work may be done? Is it farfetched to imagine a direct link with United States foreign policy and imperial strategy? Could the U.S. intelligence community be directly involved?'.

By contrast, SIL has received impressive accolades from prestigious places. On May 6, 1988, United Nations Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar praised SIL in a letter to then-SIL President Kenneth Gregerson:

> Your mission as ambassadors of literacy deserves high praise. By transcribing into writing mother tongues that were previously unwritten, especially among tribespeople distant from urban centers, you are facilitating the preservation of ethnic cultures and building bridges for those cultures to the rest of humanity.

In 2006, Papua New Guinea awarded SIL the Independence Anniversary Medal of Appreciation. In the same year, the Peruvian National Congress passed a motion to salute and congratulate SIL-Peru on its sixtieth anniversary.

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[1] Actually, it's a family of independent organizations. Partners include about forty Wycliffe 'sending' organizations (e.g. Wycliffe Sweden, Wycliffe Ukraine, Wycliffe Togo), over a dozen national Bible translation organizations (e.g. Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy, Translators Association of the Philippines), JAARS, The Seed Company, Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, Wycliffe Associates, and Wycliffe Foundation.

The name 'SIL' comes from the organization's origins as a Summer Institute of Linguistics, first held in 1934 in Arkansas. The name 'Wycliffe' comes from John Wycliffe, who is often credited with being the first to translate the Bible into English.

[2] I distinguish between EVANGELICAL, which refers to Christians who emphasize the teachings and authority of the Bible, and EVANGELIZE, which is a nonpejorative synonym of PROSELYTIZE.

Who is telling the truth? We cannot categorically dismiss SIL's critics, because there are some reasonable questions about SIL's organizational structure and how it operates. There is plenty of discussion within the organization on these points (Svelmoe, this collection), and there are individual cases where SIL workers have not followed organizational policy. And, to accept the Pérez de Cuéllar quote uncritically is to commit the 'appeal to authority' fallacy.

My aim in this paper is to explain the goals of SIL and to respond to a common misrepresentation of SIL's goals. I hope that the new generation of linguists will find that they can in good conscience collaborate with SIL in the urgent task of preserving endangered languages.

2. SIL—a hybrid organization. SIL's premier linguist Kenneth Pike told a story that speaks to the hybrid nature of SIL's goals:

> In 1980 while Evelyn and I were lecturing in China, we were honored at a dinner at Beijing Foreign Studies University. I was seated next to a Chinese gentleman who had just returned from lecturing at Berkeley. When he learned who I was he said, 'Ah yes, I heard about you while I was in the USA. But I also heard you are a missionary. So which are you, a missionary or a linguist?' I thought fast and told him I was a hybrid, a mule. His expression caused me to explain myself. Mules are the result of breeding between a horse, wanted for its speed, and a donkey, wanted for its strength and ability to walk over rocks in the road. When you want to combine the two qualities you have a mule. So sometimes I'm a horse and sometimes I'm a donkey, but I'm always a mule. I am both a missionary and a linguist. (Headland 2004:295)[3]

SIL's three goals are spelled out in its articles of incorporation, its ends statements, and also in its official purpose statement at the top of the SIL home page:

> By facilitating language-based development, SIL International serves the peoples of the world through research, translation, and literacy.

The goal that SIL is best known for is bible translation. Although translating the Bible is fundamentally a scholarly task (as with any piece of literature), it is also true that one can be religiously motivated to do it. Another goal is research, which mostly involves linguistics.[4] An acceptable job of translating the Bible requires an in-depth knowledge of the target language and its structures and also the culture associated with that language. SIL contributes to the scholarly community by providing the results of its research. SIL's linguistics training programs fall under this rubric as well. The third goal is literacy. SIL facilitates local language literacy programs and the production of a wide variety of vernacular materials. SIL is an active participant in larger development agency networks. This includes having formal consultative status with UNESCO (UNESCO 2005).

SIL sees research and literacy not just as tools for Bible translation, but also as ends in themselves. For example, SIL places more emphasis on local language literature production (including enabling mother-tongue authors) than would be justified for just training people to read the Scriptures.

2.1. Research and training. A typical SIL project includes a substantial time investment in language/culture learning and language description, ideally producing a

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[3] The synthesis of faith and scholarship is another enigma for many in Western society, where God is often pitted against science in the popular media (a false dichotomy in my view). It was also an issue within SIL (see Svelmoe's contribution to this collection). Pike put down his own reflections on the subject in his book *With heart and mind* (1962).

[4] Other fields of research in which SIL workers have involvement include cultural anthropology, ethnomusicology, translation theory, education and literacy, and Biblical language studies.

grammar, a dictionary, and a text collection. For example, a typical dictionary produced by the SIL Mexico Branch takes about five years of full-time work to produce (Doris Bartholomew, p.c.).

Most of SIL's linguists, whom we affectionately refer to as OWLs (Ordinary Working Linguists), have taken three to four semesters of graduate linguistics courses, and approximately half of them have a master's degree. These OWLs receive further training and consultant help from the over 300 Ph.D. linguists in the organization. In the distant past, a number of grammars were written in the tagmemics framework, but today a variety of current theories—no longer including tagmemics—are taught in SIL's training programs. Currently, SIL students receive training in government and binding, typological-functional grammar, lexical-functional grammar, or role and reference grammar (among others), depending on the particular training program they attend.

SIL's scholarly output is impressive. The SIL Bibliography lists over 13,000 entries of books, journal articles, book chapters, dissertations, and other academic papers (SIL International 2009a). In addition, SIL workers participate extensively in the scholarly community. They have served on the LSA Executive Committee, the editorial board of *Language*, and the *Language* review committee. Two past presidents of the LSA were SIL workers.[5] SIL workers have played key roles in founding or providing crucial support for several linguistics journals, including *Mon-Khmer Studies*, *Journal of West African Languages*, *Philippine Journal of Linguistics*, and *Language and Linguistics in Melanesia*. Several SIL workers serve or have served as tenured faculty at secular universities, and many more serve as adjunct professors in colleges and universities. SIL has cooperative agreements with several universities in the US and abroad to provide faculty for linguistics programs in these institutions. SIL and SIL-related programs provide linguistics training in more than fifteen countries (SIL International 2009b). A steadily increasing percentage of students in these formal programs are mother-tongue speakers who want to translate the Bible into their own language.

SIL, however, is not a typical scholarly organization. We teach, do research, and publish, but with our Christian composition and our goals of practical literacy training and Bible translation, we don't fit the prototype.

2.2. Literacy and education. The second goal of SIL is literacy and education. SIL works with indigenous communities and national departments of education and collaborates with other nongovernmental organizations and development agencies. They assist local language groups in creating practical orthographies and organizing and training indigenous people to teach reading and writing.

SIL encourages native authorship of indigenous literature. They assist the language communities in creating a body of literature that includes primers, instructional materials, bilingual education materials, health booklets (such as those dealing with malaria, AIDS, and avian flu), and written versions of their own oral traditions. In 1973 SIL translated, published, and distributed the *Universal declaration of human rights* into twenty-five South American indigenous languages and in 1988 into nine more indigenous languages. (All thirty-four were published in booklet form by the Peruvian Ministry of Education in 1988.)

SIL has carried out literacy work in over 1,000 languages. More than two million people have learned to read and write as a direct result of SIL's literacy work, and

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[5] Kenneth Pike and Eugene Nida. To be precise, Nida was president of the LSA after he had left SIL to join the United Bible Societies.

millions more have become literate as an indirect result of the work.[6] An important point to highlight is that SIL is committed to local control of literacy and capacity development among members of the local language community (SIL International 2009c).

2.3. Bible translation. The third goal of SIL is Bible translation. SIL's articles of incorporation do not mention religious or ecclesiastical activities, but rather the three goals discussed here. This is because the goals of the organization—including Bible translation—are not religious tasks per se, but rather scholarly ones. If SIL were incorporated as a missions organization, it would undoubtedly do less linguistic research.

Most of SIL's workers are members of Wycliffe Bible Translators, a partner organization that raises funds and recruits workers for SIL.[7] Because of the tie between the two organizations, some have said—by transitivity—that SIL is a 'missions' organization. And because of Bible translation, SIL cooperates with organizations that all would agree are missions.

It is not important what people call us, as long as the label has accurate denotations and connotations. If 'mission' means that SIL workers preach, baptize, or start churches, then it is a misnomer. SIL's articles of incorporation speak to its translation work, but there is no mention of ecclesiastical functions. In fact, the executive limitations defined by SIL's board of directors prohibit these activities. In 1942 Cameron Townsend, SIL's cofounder, asked Brainerd Legters to resign from SIL because Legters was emphasizing evangelism. This was salient because Legters was the son of the other cofounder (Hartch 2006:73). Even today, SIL encourages members whose primary interest is evangelism to leave SIL and join other organizations whose practices are more in that line. In my own work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I turned down numerous offers to preach, simply because that is not my job. There are those who refer to SIL workers as missionaries, but with our three goals, we do not fit the prototype.

Besides accurately reflecting what we actually do, the way SIL is incorporated has a pragmatic function: it allows us to partner formally with governments and institutions in ways that may not be possible otherwise. For example, we were able to do our scholarly work in Mexico in our early days at a time when Protestant mission organizations were prohibited from working there (Hartch 2006:10).

SIL's nonecclesiastical organizational structure has led some critics to accuse us falsely of trying to hide our Bible-translation goal. In response, I would point out two things. First, the officials from the governments and institutions with which we contract are fully aware of our Bible-translation goal. Second, SIL states its Bible-translation goal clearly on its own website, as well as in materials that predate the internet such as annual reports and scholarly works (e.g. Brend & Pike 1977). In my own interactions with other linguists, I go out of my way to make sure that they understand SIL's Bible-translation goal. Then, we get on with discussing linguistics.

3. Recycled accusations. A common misrepresentation of SIL's goals is that SIL forces indigenous people to become Christians and hence contributes to damaging cultures. For example, in a recent SSILA Bulletin, Hein van der Voort (2006) straw-

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[6] These numbers are based on a detailed survey of all SIL entities worldwide conducted in the early-mid 1990s by then-SIL International Literacy Coordinator Steve Walter.

[7] SIL hires directly some staff for particular jobs, such as office support roles or language-related software development. In such cases, legislation regarding nondiscrimination is followed.

mans SIL as 'a proselytizing organization' with an 'ultimate goal . . . of replacing indigenous cultures with a specific Western one'.

Van der Voort's concern is laudable—that indigenous people have a right to choose their own way of life and not be coerced into making decisions that they do not want to make. SIL supports indigenous people's right to self-determination. At the same time, SIL believes that people have a right to informed choices. History has shown us the danger of attempts to restrict people's access to information.

Some would claim that a putative power differential between outsiders and indigenous people means that the indigenous people are unable to make reasoned decisions. On the contrary, the indigenous people I know are quite smart. They are perfectly capable of making their own decisions and exercising self-determination. As former SIL member Dan Everett notes, when he told the Pirahã of Brazil about Jesus, eventually they asked him to stop (Everett 2008:263–64). They certainly were not at the mercy of the 'intrusion' of outside ideas.

The right to self-determination also includes the right to change one's view. Linguist Matthew Dryer of the University at Buffalo put it this way in January 2007 (p.c., quoted with permission):

> [T]he question of whether SIL's religious activities have a negative impact on indigenous communities misses a fundamental point. What right do we as academics in universities in the U.S. and other western countries have to decide what is best for indigenous communities? Isn't that for them to decide? . . . Missionaries do not force people to become Christians. They simply give them the choice. Those academics who would like to stop missionaries from working in indigenous communities want to prevent people in indigenous communities from having that choice. I have made the choice not to be a Christian. Why shouldn't people in indigenous communities also be allowed to decide whether or not to be Christians?

The accusation that SIL's work damages cultures has already been made and found wanting. In 1975, a formal charge was brought against SIL to the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) Committee on Ethics. It questioned: (i) whether SIL's work supports the physical, social, and psychological welfare of indigenous groups, and (ii) SIL's respect for the cultural pluralism of indigenous societies. In May of that year the AAA wrote a letter to SIL describing the complaint and inviting SIL to formally respond; Kenneth Pike replied in a fifteen-page letter dated May 21, 1975. After spending a year investigating the charges, the AAA's Committee on Ethics submitted its report to the AAA Executive Board. The committee decided unanimously in favor of SIL, and the executive board accepted the committee's findings also by a unanimous vote (Headland 2004).

In spite of this formal exoneration, the charges still persist in some circles. What is really the issue? In my view it is that people are attempting to marginalize something they do not agree with. It is an ideological issue. Our translation work adds to the choices available to indigenous people. It just happens to be a choice that some critics do not like.

In contrast, SIL has a core value that we call 'service to all'. We cooperate with the governments in the countries where we work in order that indigenous communities might benefit regardless of the ideology of the government. We fly Catholics, atheists, fundamentalists, Marxists, and anthropologists in our airplanes. We give away our software and our language codes. We share our resources with anyone who would benefit, those who like us and those who do not.

Several documented cases show how SIL's work strengthens local cultures. Cahill (2003, 2004) examines a dozen case studies of endangered languages. In each case,

the language group's numbers were dangerously low, but a population increase began when SIL started working in the language community. In Cahill's estimation, the major factor in reversing the decline of these very small language groups was the long-term presence (measured in decades) of committed outsiders, and the access to Western medicine that it afforded.

Finally, I take issue with the charge that we are promoting something Western. Christianity did not start in the West, and today, the majority of Christians are not Western (Jenkins 2002). Gambian-born Yale Divinity School Professor Lamin Sanneh (1989, 2003) has written extensively on how Bible translation into indigenous languages frees the Christian message of colonial trappings and leads specifically to an indigenous Christianity expressive of the local character rather than a Western Christianity. Neither is literacy nor its benefits uniquely Western. SIL's literacy programs promote reading and writing equally, and they are tailored to each specific local sociolinguistic situation.

4. Conclusion. The major criticism of SIL is the claim that SIL's work damages indigenous cultures. On this question, SIL has been judged and vindicated. Critics have tried to make this case against SIL for decades. It has never been substantiated. And the motive behind the criticism is usually ideological.

On the contrary, SIL works for the benefit of indigenous peoples in tangible ways. It has a corporate ethos of service to all, and it shares other linguists' embrace of the scientific approach. Hence, SIL is happy to work with other linguists, to help document the world's endangered languages, and to work in practical ways toward strengthening these languages as well as their related cultures.

The stakes are high. Languages are dying out at an alarming rate, and we need to work together for the benefit of indigenous cultures around the world.

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